

## **Introduction**

Education and training are considered fundamental for all cultural heritage stakeholders. To explore and validate one's cultural heritage, to examine thoroughly those institutions which have persisted through centuries is the first step in a people's search for freedom. The purpose of this discussion document is to reflect on the importance of cultural heritage. Its intention create space for discussion within SADTU about the value of our cultural heritage, to appraise our members about the need for promoting our cultural heritage in our quest for human development; and identify issues that SADTU can elevate in the national discourse so as to conscientise our members and society in general in pursuit of cultural emancipation. The role our cultural heroes and heroines who contributed to our freedom of expression and association in quest for societal transformation must be investigated and celebrated.

### **Why is it important to celebrate our cultural heritage?**

To create a new nation, Africans must synthesise African traditions with modern technological methods to foster economic, social and political development. Individual and collective potential are developed through the common understanding of historical roots which provide a sense of total being, both within the individual and all others. We therefore need to create a rejuvenated and balanced world. Without this, nothing will have meaning. In effect, our independence has meant only a change in leadership, not a restructuring of economic, social and political relationship between the people and government. As long as Africans still suffer from poverty, ignorance and diseases, Africans are not yet liberated. In South Africa, we had, and still have, an identity crisis.

In contrast to this challenge, Mabulla (2000) posits that *"Africa is fortunate because the continent is a warehouse for the heritage resources, which document the origin and development of our humanity"*. Celebrating Heritage Day and Heritage Month has no value if we do not know the past, to learn what life was and what it would be in the future. Therefore as a country and a continent we need to constantly ask questions about our past for instance; what past and present information is available on Africa? Heritage Day and Month assist Africans to repossess the universal memory that Africa is the cradle of humanity, the ancestral home of all human beings

Soga (1862) wrote:

*"Did we not form nations in the past? Did we not have our traditional leaders? What has happened to the wisdom of these leaders? Did we not have poets? Where is their poetry? Was there no witchcraft in the past? Did we not fight wars? Who were the heroes? Where is the distinctive regalia of the royal regiment? "Did we not hunt? Why was the meat of the chest of the rhino and the buffalo reserved for royalty? Where are the people to teach us our history, our knowledge and our wisdom? Let even the spirit of the departed return to bless us with the great gift of our heritage, which we must preserve!"*

## **Celebrating our National (South African) national symbols, including our National Orders**

Our National Motto, !ke e: /xarra/ //ke – which means – diverse people come together, – both pays tribute to the /Xam people among the Khoi, whose language is now extinct, and again affirms our African identity. Both our flag and our national anthem represent bold and creative contributions to our continuing task to further strengthen our national reconciliation. The truly beautiful and indigenous national flower, the strelitzia, known in isiXhosa as Ikhamanga, the mighty tree, the Baobab symbolises and celebrates selfless service to our people. The South African national Coat of Arms should include a symbol which represents the defence or protection of the nation. For Our identity as Africans, we need to know the Secretary Bird with its stretched wings, the best hunter of the serpents of the wild, to symbolise the protection of the nation.

### **The history and Heritage of Mapungubwe**

Mapungubwe is the most pre-colonial farming site in South Africa. Mapungubwe's architecture and spatial arrangement provide the earliest evidence for class distinction and sacred leadership in southern Africa (Huffman, 2000).

Africans invented the art of writing in the form of Egyptian hieroglyphics. In later years they modified it into a phonetic sign language consisting of twenty-four word-signs, each of which had one consonant. These were the foundation of the emergence of the modern alphabets. To be able to do mummification these Africans had to master a number of different disciplines, including physics, chemistry, medicine and surgery. The Egyptians mastered these disciplines over many years of experience and later taught, especially the Greeks, who in turn spread this knowledge to the rest of the Western Europe. Among others, the ancient Africa Egyptian tombs are famous for the mummies that date back thousands of years. Egyptians were able to do mummification because of their high expertise in surgical techniques. Between 5600 and 5400 years ago Egyptians produced what is today known as the Smith Papyrus, which is a treatise on bone surgery and external pathology. Ancient Egyptians invented mathematics and divided it into arithmetic, algebra and geometry. This knowledge was later passed on to the Greeks. The development of the ancient calendar began in Egypt, initially by observing the behaviour of the Nile River which had three cycles of four months each. Egyptians also engaged in engineering, construction, shipbuilding and architecture.

Timbuktu became the intellectual and trading hub between the 14th and 16th centuries. Timbuktu was a confluence of ideas, languages and cultures. Africa was not only a repository of knowledge from ancient civilisations across the world but evidence also indicates that Africa should also be regarded as an important conduit for knowledge to Europe during its Renaissance in the late 15th century.

### **The role the Culture of Ubuntu and Maat in Africa as our heritage**

It is necessary to seek common ground on the concept of culture in South Africa. Culture is a sum total of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, and attitudes and meaning of objects. Some of the basic elements of culture are language, non-verbal codes, relationships, world-view, and patterns of thinking, activity orientation, reward systems and conflict management strategies. The culture of Ubuntu displays tolerance in statements such as ‘it does not matter that she/he is not one of our culture and speak a different language, she/he is a person too’.

The promotion of the culture of Ubuntu as a nation building concept is fundamental in building democracy. Giving back people their self-respect and dignity is to begin to reconstruct and develop society. If democracy means equality, justice and human dignity, it means that individuals and groups should have cultural freedom just as they have political freedom. They should have cultural freedom to practice their culture as the source of their own self-esteem. The freedom should be the goal of democratic South Africa. In a democratic South Africa, Ubuntu should help pupils and the general pupil to resolve conflicts that could arise from the individual identification with her cultural group in addition to help the promotion of democracy and national unity in South Africa. This is one of the roles that SADTU should contribute to in the promotion of our cultural heritage.

A culture of Ubuntu should be structured in such a way that people have to maintain their cultural community identity as well as understand and maintain a healthy relationship with other cultural communities which make up South African society. Ubuntu should be used to help people to understand and know other people’s cultures. This could be done by introducing as part of the syllabus various cultural tendencies existing in South Africa. This could contribute to racial reconciliation and tolerance because pupils will be put in a position to understand behaviours of different cultural groups.

### **The role of SADTU in celebrating cultural heritage**

In African indigenous culture, there are positive virtues from which we can learn, for instance the unity of community which is at the heart of African culture. For SADTU, as a leading institution in the liberation of an African mind, it is important to realise that there is a need to start to engage with civil society and lead the process of restoring the dignity of Africans by developing programmes that will foster better working relationship through cultural education activities; such as celebrating African culture of ubuntu and our heroes who played

a meaningful role in our political emancipation. We should use the political space that has been created post-1994 to push forward for the total emancipation of African people by organising different cultural activities such as arts, sports and historical commemoration of our liberation stalwarts in the education and cultural arena. We should organise culture activities that will bring us together to celebrate the African philosophy of Ubuntu in our different communities. We should dedicate the heritage month to bring together Africans from all over our continent. By organising cultural activities such as drama, sports, public speeches in commemoration of great African leaders such as King Albert Lithuli, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, Nkwame Nkrumah, Matthew Goniwe, Curtis Nkondo through memorial lectures, we will promote the spirit of togetherness and tackle challenges such as xenophobia within African communities. During the Heritage month we should also celebrate African writers who have contributed in writing African History from an African perspective, writers such as Steve Biko, Ali Mazrui, Chinua Achebe, Ousmane Sembene, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Mazisi Kunene, Ingrid Jonker, Olive Schreiner, N.P. van Wyk Louw, Ayi Kwei Armah and Ben Okri.

## **Conclusion**

In promoting our cultural heritage in South Africa through social activities, this could reduce racial prejudice and ethnocentrism. A culture of Ubuntu will have to promote social contact between various groups. A South African child could be a valuable future citizen of this country if he/she could be made a vehicle for basic human rights and freedom. For democracy to survive, its roots have to sink deeply into the hearts and souls of the people. The best way to do this is to teach future citizens the habits and attitudes and character traits of democracy. A subject that stand a good chance of achieving this, is through celebration of our cultural heritage.